



Blue Diamond Growers

May 24, 2005

Honorable William M. Thomas
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
2208 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0522

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is to reflect the support of Blue Diamond Growers and its farmer members for the passage of the Central American Free Trade Agreement including the Dominican Republic. This agreement provides duty free access to all of the CAFTA countries including the Dominican Republic. All of these countries represent good markets for Blue Diamond almonds.

As you know, almonds are the number one agricultural export from California. U.S. almonds are grown exclusively in California and are the largest tree crop in the state. In fact, over \$1 billion of almonds were exported from California to the world last year. It is expected that exports may top \$2 billion this year. Almonds rank as the seventh largest agricultural export from the United States. Over 87 percent of the world supply of almonds is produced in California.

Blue Diamond Growers, founded in 1910, is a nonprofit farmer-owned marketing cooperative. Blue Diamond Growers is the world's largest processor and marketer of almonds. Blue Diamond processes and markets approximately 24 percent of the world's supply of almonds. Approximately, 3,700 California almond farmers own the cooperative, which represents two-thirds of the California almond industry.

Blue Diamond also supports the ongoing WTO multilateral negotiations and urges their completion. It is hoped that the completion of these negotiations will result in duty free access for almonds worldwide. This includes shelled, inshell, and processed almonds including roasted, salted, and similar products.

It is hoped that CAFTA-DR will soon be approved in both the House and the Senate. Your leadership in obtaining the approval of this important trade agreement is very much appreciated.

Very truly yours,

Julian B. Heron
Counsel to Blue Diamond Growers